

Mission – a life of grace and adventure

Life as a Divine Word Missionary has been filled with grace and adventure for Fr Henry Adler SVD – a life devoted to proclaiming God’s love and to walking with people of different cultures and faiths, especially those who are struggling at the margins of society.

Growing up with both German and Polish cultures in post-war Poland, Fr Henry says he received an early insight into what it means to live as part of an ethnic minority, inspiring in him an abiding curiosity for people who are different.

“As far back as I can remember, I’ve always been curious about people who are different,” he says. “I see that curiosity as a gift and I’ve always been thankful that God gave me that gift to use in my missionary life.”

After joining the Society of the Divine Word – or the Divine Word Missionaries, as they are more commonly known – Fr Henry’s vocation quickly led him to the other side of the world.

“I completed my formation in Melbourne, was ordained in New Zealand and then worked in Papua New Guinea for seven years, before coming back to Australia to work, first in formation of SVD seminarians and now as the Mission Secretary for the Australian Province,” he says.

“It has been a lifelong adventure for me, sharing with people who are different to me, but also having an opportunity to give to them.

“As I reflect on it, sharing faith with people of other cultures has always been an experience of grace for me, my own Pentecost, really. And it’s also been fun!”

Fr Henry is passionate about promoting a sense of Mission, not only to the SVD missionaries, but also to the people to whom they minister and to the whole people of God.

“The word ‘mission’ comes from the Latin word *mittere*, which means to send. So in its most general sense, a mission is an assigned duty or task,” he says.

“But Christian Mission today is understood more as a deep desire to share the Good News of the Kingdom of God with all people; with all creation. This desire originates in the personal experience of the Risen Christ who offers the fullness of life to all.

“The Church is missionary by its very nature because it exists to continue the work of the risen Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit, and to respond to Jesus’ words: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of*

Greetings from Australia,

Sending best wishes for World Mission Day on Sunday.

For your information, please find a link to the AUS Province website where we celebrate World Mission Day with a story from Mission Secretary Fr Henry Adler SVD who shares his personal thoughts on Mission
<http://www.divineword.com.au/events/index.html>.

Also attached for your information is a longer, feature-length version of the story, which is appearing in some Catholic publications around Australia and New Zealand to mark Mission Day.

Kindest Regards,

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the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

Fr Henry is quick to emphasise that Mission is not just for vowed missionaries who go off to work in far distant lands – rather, it is for all the Baptised.

“Through the sacrament of Baptism, each of us is empowered for mission,” he says. “So while some of the Baptised are sent to mission lands, each of us is called to witness to the person and the message of Jesus in the daily tasks of our lives.”

For the Divine Word Missionaries, the ultimate purpose of Mission today remains that of the founder of the Society, St Arnold Janssen: “To proclaim the Kingdom of God's love”.

“We see mission today as prophetic dialogue not a monologue,” Fr Henry says. “In prophetic dialogue we especially commit ourselves to people who are faith seekers, who are poor and marginalised, who are of different cultures and who are of different religions and ideologies.

“And so, in that dialogue, we reach out to others, seeking to bridge the divisions that keep us separated from one another and from God.”

Fr Henry says the SVDs feel especially called to dialogue in the world today because of the Society's own interculturality.

“Our members are drawn from every continent on earth and our Mission has been an intercultural one from the very foundation of our Society. Interculturality is in our DNA as SVDs,” he says.

“We have also been very fortunate to be able to share in God's mission with many lay partners and friends around the world,” Fr Henry says. “Our benefactors make it possible for us to staff and run schools, hospitals and orphanages in poorer parts of the world and to be with people who are being pushed to the margins of society.

In the last five years, thanks to the faith and generosity of benefactors, the Mission Office of the SVD Australian Province has distributed \$2.5 million dollars to mission works with communities in need across Asia, Africa, South America and Asia.

“We seek out the poor and the marginalised in our work, whether it's in parish ministry, caring for children and adults living with AIDS in Thailand, or being with people who are neglected or discriminated against such as refugees and migrants, and indigenous people,” Fr Henry says.

“It's God's mission, not ours. But in an incredible act of grace, God shares that mission with women and men. And that's the great adventure we're on.”